

## Editorial Comments

### THE DEATH OF SIR ALEXANDER OGSTON

Sir Alexander Ogston, K.C.V.O., M.D., C.M., LL.D., Extra Surgeon to the King in Scotland and Emeritus Professor of Surgery in the University of Aberdeen, died at his home on February 1st last, at the age of eighty-four years.

His death, which is much regretted, removes a notable figure from the ranks of the profession, one who did much for the science of medicine and for the advance of his own particular branch. Inasmuch as for nearly twenty years Sir Alexander had been retired from the active duties of the Chair of Surgery at Aberdeen he has been little more than a name to the present generation of medical students, but those who studied their bacteriology in the early nineties of the last century, then a subject just in its infancy, will remember Ogston as the discoverer of *staphylococcus aureus* (1882) as a cause of abscess-formation, and will associate his name with other pioneers of the time—Pasteur, Lister, Billroth (to whom we owe the name streptococcus, or "chain coccus"), Fehleisen (who connected the *streptococcus pyogenes* with erysipelas), (1887), Rosenbach, and Weichselbaum.

Alexander Ogston was born in April, 1844, the eldest son of Francis Ogston, Professor of Medical Jurisprudence in the University of Aberdeen. He took his M.B., C.M. at Aberdeen, with honours, in 1865, and one year after received his doctorate. Later, he studied abroad, at Prague, Vienna, Berlin, and Paris. Starting in his native place as a general practitioner he soon developed a special reputation for his skill in surgery, until his work eventually became purely consulting. On the retirement of Professor William Pirrie in 1882 Ogston became Regius Professor of Surgery at Aberdeen, a post which he held with great distinction for twenty-seven years. Educated before the days of antiseptics, Ogston had the scientific and progressive turn of mind which led him to accept the lead of the new study of bacteriology, so that he was an early convert to the Listerian doctrine. His own studies on the question of suppuration led to his discovery of one of its microbic causes and it is to him that we owe the specific name, *staphylococcus aureus*, because of its resemblance, as it seemed to him, to a bunch of grapes.

Early in his career he devoted himself to bone-surgery, and devised the operation for genu valgum, known as Ogston's operation. But, his greater interest seemed to lie in the subject of military surgery, and he gained much

experience in this branch in the Egyptian war of 1884 and 1885, in South Africa in 1899, and in the Great War in 1914 and successive years.

During his life-time Ogston received many and varied honours. He was President of the British Medical Association at the Carlisle meeting in 1896. He was Surgeon-in-Ordinary in succession to Queen Victoria, King Edward VII, and King George V. He was an LL.D. of the Universities of Glasgow and Aberdeen. He was a member of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Chirurgie, and a corresponding member of La Société Royale des Sciences Médicales et Naturelles de Bruxelles. In 1912 he was made a Knight Commander of the Royal Victorian Order.

Sir Alexander Ogston contributed much to medical literature. The most noteworthy of his papers are: "The operative treatment of genu valgum," (*Edin. Med. J.* 1876-77); "The growth and maintenance of the articular ends of adult bones," (*J. Anat. & Physiol.* 1878); "Report upon micro-organisms in surgical diseases," (*Brit. M. J.* 1881); "Micrococcus poisoning," (*J. Anat. & Physiol.* 1882); "Continental criticism of English rifle bullets," (*Brit. M. J.* 1899); and "A new principle for curing club-foot," (*Brit. M. J.* 1902).

Sir Alexander Ogston was noted for his painstaking care in the examination of his patients, his manual dexterity, and his attention to detail. As a teacher he was thorough, clear, and graphic, and his course on systematic surgery was far in advance of the current textbooks of the day. A great man has passed.

A.G.N.

### THE LATE PROFESSOR UNNA

The name of Paul Gersen Unna, who has recently died in his seventy-ninth year, is known the world over as one who has done more than anyone else for the cause of scientific dermatology.

Unna was born on September 8, 1850, in the city of Hamburg. He began the study of medicine at Heidelberg, but his studies were quickly interrupted by the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian war, in which he served, receiving a dangerous wound in the leg. After the close of hostilities he resumed his medical course at Heidelberg, Leipzig, and Strasbourg, obtaining his doctorate at the last-mentioned university in 1875. He started the practice of medicine with his father in his native place, and practically the whole of his professional life was spent there.

Unna's special interest lay in the subjects of the biochemistry and histochemistry of the

skin. His inaugural dissertation for his degree was concerned with the development of the skin, based on its staining reactions, and its revolutionary conclusions led to the violent opposition of von Recklinghausen and nearly prevented him from receiving his degree. His early studies on leprosy were also largely histological.

In 1890 Unna first described plasma cells, which were not accepted as an entity by many of his contemporaries, notably Neisser, but are now recognized as possessing quite distinctive characteristics.

A few years later Unna wrote much on the subject of eczema, in which disease he thought that he had discovered the cause in an organism which he called the *morococcus*. His findings were not substantiated and he eventually gave up the claim.

Unna did much also for the cause of therapeutics in connection with diseases of the skin. He introduced, for example, the use of ichthyol.

Unna travelled much in other countries, extending his peregrinations as far as the United States. In consequence, he seems to have become better known and better appreciated abroad than at home.

His literary output was enormous, more than six hundred publications on various phases of his special subject coming from his pen. He was the founder of the *Dermatologische Wochenschrift*, and in this journal most of his publications appeared. He brought out, together with the late Sir Malcolm Morris and others, The International Atlas of Rare Diseases. Then he produced the celebrated Atlas of the Pathological Histology of the Skin, in nine volumes.

Granted in 1907 the title of Professor, it was not until twelve years later that Unna, in his sixty-ninth year, became a professor in an actual university, for it was not until that date that the proposed University of Hamburg became a fact.

A man of keen intellect, a great worker, and absorbed in his work, Unna kept up his activities with unabated zeal to the last. He truly died in harness. A.G.N.

#### THE MEYERS MEMORIAL

Special attention is called to the announcement that appears on page 426 of the *Journal* in regard to the Meyers Memorial. In these days of stress, both physical and mental, the subject of the functional neuroses in their bearing upon insanity is gaining in importance, and well merits the attention of those specialists who are competent to deal with it. It is earnestly hoped that the far-sighted provision of the late Dr. Campbell Meyers will call forth the presentation of more than one paper on the matter at the coming meeting of the Canadian Medical Association. Such contri-

butions would be of great interest and value to the general practitioner above all, as he is, naturally, the first person who is likely to meet with the conditions referred to, and on him falls the chief responsibility. A.G.N.

#### THE RADIOACTIVE CONTENT OF MINERAL WATERS

The Editor recently received from one of our members an enquiry regarding the bona fides of a company offering for sale not only their product, a radio-active mineral water, but their capital stock. The correspondent stated that he understood this particular mineral water had been analyzed at the McGill Laboratory. Enquiry from Professor A. S. Eve, the head of the Physics Department, elicited the following comment, with permission to publish:

"From time to time specimens of mineral waters are sent to various centres of research, such as the Bureau of Standards, Washington, or to the laboratories of universities, with a view to the determination of the radioactive content, either of radium in solution, or of radium emanation (radon) adsorbed as a gas. The amount of radioactive material in such waters is generally small, and, on the other hand, almost all waters contain some radioactive material. The units in which these contents are expressed are generally understood only by a few specially trained men, so that the public and even the medical profession, are rather mystified by the situation. Again the amount of dose of radium, or of radium emanation, which may perhaps be beneficial to a patient is entirely unknown to the physicist, and an embarrassing situation has arisen, which sometimes leads to imposture.

In some cases radioactive mineral waters have been specially advertised for consumption when it would be necessary to drink perhaps a barrel or two a day in order to obtain a medicinal dose. In order to gain more clear information on this undesirable situation, is it not advisable that the Canadian Medical Association should appoint a small joint committee of medical men and physicists, who would issue a clear report which might be circulated to all interested?"

#### SUBSCRIPTION TO THE BRITISH MEDICAL ASSOCIATION JOURNAL

In accordance with the affiliation agreement entered into between the British Medical Association and the Canadian Medical Association several years ago, we are glad to remind members of the Canadian Medical Association that the *British Medical Association Journal* is available to them at half-price, namely, £1. 11. 6. Subscriptions should be sent direct to the Financial Secretary of the British Medical Association, Tavistock Square, London, W.C.1, England. A.T.B.